**Victory through Obedience**

*Numbers 20:10-13*

**Context**

As the end of the wilderness wandering for the sons of Israel, they again were at Kadesh ready to enter the Promised Land. The punishment for their disobedience was up and they were poised to enter into God’s promise of a land flowing with milk and honey.

Moses had faithfully led them since the exodus from Egypt all the while they were continually complaining. If they were going to enter into the promise, it wasn’t because of their faithfulness or their changed hearts. It would only happen because of God’s faithfulness and the Lord’s covenantal promise.

The narrative given in Numbers 20 helps us to see some extraordinary things about Yahweh and His dealing with His people—including His servant Moses.

Moses was a man with no equal. He was chosen from birth; he was raised in Pharaoh’s household; he worked amazing miracles—including parting the Red Sea; he spoke with Yahweh face to face and as such his face shone brightly. He writes five books of the bible; and he’s a songwriter (**Deut 32**).

**Revelation 15:3-4**—*And they \*sang the song of Moses, the bond-servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, “Great and marvelous are Your works, O Lord God, the Almighty; Righteous and true are Your ways, King of the nations!* ***4****“Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For You alone are holy; For all the nations will come and worship before You, For Your righteous acts have been revealed.”*

He is an amazing leader (a type of the One to come). In addition to these accomplishments, he was the humblest man on the face of the earth (**Numbers 12:3**). He endured tremendous hardships because of the people whom God had given him charge. However, he faithfully shepherd them; ministered to them; pleaded for them, and cared patiently for them time and time again. But his patience seemingly had a limit.

Context:

* Miriam has just died
* The 40 years of wandering are up
* They are ready to enter, but their complaining isn’t any better than their forefathers (**Num 20:16**)
* Location: Kadesh—north end of the Sinai desert (bordering the Promised Land)
* Same place Moses sent the 12 spies 40 years earlier (**Num 13:26**)
* There is no water in the desert
* The number of people is likely 2MM plus livestock
* This is familiar territory in that there were other times where they needed the common grace of water
* The circumstances are no coincidence
* God is sovereign and is orchestrating all of the details
* Two-fold trial for Moses: 1) the death of his sister 2) no water with 2 million complainers

***3****The people thus contended with Moses and spoke, saying, “If only we had breathed our last when our brothers breathed their last before Yahweh!*

* **Application:** How often do we have trials come at the “worst possible moment?” So, what is God doing in the moment?
* Moses had been commanded earlier to strike the rock; this time he is told to speak to the rock
* Moses is severely judged for his disobedience, without mercy and without partiality
* He will die and not enter into the Promised Land because of it
* He will not enter because of his “rebellion.” That’s the same Hebrew word used to describe Israel’s rebellion
* Everyone in this text is a rebel
* He pleads with God to recant; God is angry with him and tells him to speak no more of it (**Deut 3**)
* Why did Moses respond the way he does? More importantly, why does God respond the way He does?

**2 reasons we overcome only through obedience**

1. **God’s \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ is Blind**

**Numbers 20:10-11**—*and Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly before the rock. And he said to them, “Listen now, you rebels; shall we bring forth water for you out of this rock?”****11****Then Moses raised high his hand and struck the rock twice with his rod; and water came forth abundantly, and the congregation and their beasts drank.*

* + 1. The stage is set for Moses to act on God’s behalf

**9***So Moses took the rod from before Yahweh, just as He had commanded him*

* + - 1. It had been 40 years of miracles: 10 plagues, Red Sea crossing, sandals did not wear out, water, mana, quail, etc.
      2. He starts to do what he has consistently and faithfully done prior
      3. Moses and Arron gathered the assembly before the rock
    1. And then…he disobeys (in a number of ways)
       1. First sin, he said to “them”
       2. “*Listen, now you rebels*”—which is true
       3. Shall “we bring forth water from this rock”
       4. He strikes the rock twice
    2. Why does Moses do this?
       1. We don’t know his heart
       2. There is a 40 year history of his dealing with a rebellious people
       3. This is a new generation
       4. They seemingly just don’t get it
       5. And the text says, Moses (in that moment) doesn’t believe God
       6. He thinks that rather than just giving them the water, they need a good scolding
       7. He had a better way
       8. To obey your own way is unbelief. It is to deny God and deny the sufficiency of His word.[[1]](#footnote-2)
       9. **Application:** how often do we have the same man centered pragmatic logic?
    3. Obedience to God's Word is all that matters—even if it doesn’t make sense to you
    4. **Newsflash:** And if it makes “no sense at all” to you, God does not owe you an explanation
       1. Did Moses know that the rock was Christ?

**1 Corinthians 10:1-4**—*For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea;****2****and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea;****3****and all ate the same spiritual food;****4****and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them, and the rock was Christ.*

**Exodus 17:6**—*Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb; and you shall strike the rock, and water will come out of it, that the people may drink.” And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel.*

* + - 1. Would he have struck the rock if he did know?
      2. **That’s the point:** we don’t know and we don’t need to know
      3. God does not answer to us
      4. Ours is to obey!
      5. **Listen:** And to disobey, even a little bit, is a serious crime against our Holy Creator
    1. In Moses’ disobedience, he makes himself a rebel
       1. In fact, every person in this narrative account is a rebel
       2. Including Moses and Aaron

**24**“*Aaron will be gathered to his people, for he shall not enter the land which I have given to the sons of Israel because you [*plural*] rebelled against My command at the waters of Meribah.*

* + 1. **Surprising truth:** In their disobedience, God remains faithful

v**11b**—*and water came forth abundantly, and the congregation and their beasts drank.*

* + - 1. One might expect that God would not bless them because of their disobedience
      2. He does not give them what they deserve
      3. How unexpected—merciful, compassionate, gracious

**Exodus 34:6-7a**—*Then Yahweh passed by in front of him and called out, “Yahweh, Yahweh God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth;****7****who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression, and sin…* (LSB)

(Cf. **Ps 103:8-11**)

**2 Timothy 2:13**—*If we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself.*

* + 1. **Point:** This is why pragmatic obedience (obedience our own way) is always sinful. Because God's mercy is blind. God does not bless on account of your performance. God's grace is not bound to your obedience[[2]](#footnote-3)
       1. God is God

**Romans 9:15**—*For He says to Moses, “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.”*

* + - 1. This is true on the character of God, especially seen in the Doctrine of Election.
      2. Do you think you’re a better dead man than your neighbor?
      3. We therefore, cannot judge an action based on God’s blessing (because God blesses us in spite of our rebellion, to magnify the glory of his grace) but on its conformity to the Word of God
      4. To clarify:
         1. God will bless those who obey Him
         2. Conversely, God will disciple those who disobedience Him
      5. Grace is grace—unmerited favor. If it’s earned, it by definition is not grace

**John 9:1-3**—*As He passed by, He saw a man blind from birth.****2****And His disciples asked Him, saying, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he would be born blind?”****3****Jesus answered, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but this was so that the works of God might be manifested in him.*

* + 1. We cannot draw a one to one link between a particular act of obedience and God's blessing
       1. IOW, we cannot say every time God blesses someone it must be because of what they have done
       2. No, because God's mercy is blind, He blesses us out of the abundance of His grace
    2. We must have an obedience to God's by doing what He says in His word

1. **God’s \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ is Blind**

**Numbers 20:12-13**—*But Yahweh said to Moses and Aaron, “Because you did not believe Me, to treat Me as holy in the sight of the sons of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them.”****13****Those were the waters of Meribah because the sons of Israel contended with Yahweh, and He proved Himself holy among them.*

* + 1. Moses receives a strong rebuke
       1. You did not believe Me—trust in His faithfulness

**Genesis 15:6**—*Then he [Abram] believed in Yahweh; and He counted it to him as righteousness.*

* + - * 1. As a believer, in this moment, he is acting like an unbeliever
        2. His belief did not translate into action

**Hebrews 3:6-9**—*For who provoked Him when they had heard? Indeed, did not all those who came out of Egypt led by Moses?****17****And with whom was He angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose corpses fell in the wilderness?****18****And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who were disobedient?****19****So we see that they were not able to enter because of unbelief.*

* + - 1. Unbelief is ultimately the sin that damns
         1. Every other sin is forgivable
         2. For those who persist in unbelief, there is a consequence
      2. For those who are justified, God is also sanctifying
         1. Faith and unbelief both will always show their fruit

**Galatians 6:7-8**—*Do not be deceived, God is not mocked, for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap.****8****For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.*

* + - * 1. For the believer, there is an ask for forgiveness, repentance, and a change of behavior (Cf. **1 John 1:9**)
    1. Moses *did not treat* [God] *as holy in the sight of the sons of Israel*
       1. Holiness refers to God’s separateness
          1. He is utterly different than us
          2. He is full of glory, majesty and grandeur
          3. He is perfect in all His ways
          4. He is morally righteous and we are sinners

**Ps 50:21**—*These things you have done and I kept silent; You thought that I was just like you; I will reprove you and state the case in order before your eyes.*

* + - 1. God could have declared His holiness in multiple ways, but particularly does it through his moral character
      2. Why does he primarily identify this about His character?
         1. separate from us
         2. He is glorious in His perfections
         3. When God says be holy as He is holy, we don’t think of his eternality or His self-sufficiency (Aseity) or his omnipresence
         4. Those are not the things God points out is His holiness or separateness; rather, the issue is our sin and His purity (moral character
         5. Moses was in that moment, not showing off God’s holiness or separateness; the issue is his disobedience
         6. God's Word, God's precepts perfectly display all of God's holiness, all of His glory, all of His Majesty, all of His splendor

And when we tinker with God's Word, even in the slightest detail, we necessarily tarnish His glory

Changing God's Word always diminishes the perfection of the revelation of God's glory

* + - * 1. When Moses did not obey exactly what God said, it made Him look common (or like us), not an awesome God to be feared
        2. You can’t make God’s Word better. It is perfect, just as it is
    1. Moses’ choice of words
       1. They were sinful
       2. It wasn’t simply that he struck the rock vs speaking to the rock

**Psalm 106:32-33**—*They also provoked Him to wrath at the waters of Meribah, So that it went hard with Moses on their account;* ***33****Because they were rebellious against His Spirit, He spoke rashly with his lips.*

* + - 1. Compare these comments to other comments

**Exodus 14:13-14**—*But Moses said to the people, “Do not fear! Stand by and see the salvation of the Lord which He will accomplish for you today; for the Egyptians whom you have seen today, you will never see them again forever.* ***14****The Lord will fight for you while you keep silent.”*

* + - 1. Shall we bring forth water…really?

**Isaiah 48:11**—*For My own sake, for My own sake, I will act; For how can My name be profaned? And My glory I will not give to another.*

* + - 1. The goal for His redeemed is to reflect his glory as His image bearers, not usurp it
      2. To do anything else is idolatry. Idolatry is fashioning Yahweh after our imagination.
      3. **Ponder:** who of us would show mercy to complaining Israel and the judge our friend Moses?
    1. Moses receives the same blind justice as everyone else
       1. Sin is sin
       2. God is just holy and jealous for his glory
       3. He is an absolutely impartial judge
       4. If God judged his friend Moses impartially, we should certainly expect the same
       5. Although he tries on a number of occasions (pleads with Yahweh) to change God’s mind (Deuteronomy 3), God tells him to speak to Me of this matter no more.
       6. Doesn’t matter who you are, or what you’ve done. The consequences of sin are irrevocable
    2. The cross has cleared us from the eternal consequences of our sin
       1. It does not however, remove the temporal consequences we face on earth
       2. Moses illustrates this truth
       3. Moses does not face eternal condemnation for this rebellion
       4. But he certainly lost reward and suffered

**Conclusion**

The deeper we understand these two truths (God’s justice is blind and God’s mercy is blind), the better we understand the gospel. As hard as it is to accept that God has the ability to judge blindly, objectively, and without partiality, it is the only way the gospel works. God took His beloved and perfect Son and placed our sin (imputed) our sin on His account. Then God, without partiality to His Son, poured out His wrath upon Christ for sin. He is a blind judge. Any less impartial could not have done that to his own son. God judged Christ for our disobedience impartially (without ever looking at Christ's face). God’s blind justice results in my justification.

His mercy is blind as we see in His treatment of Israel. He gives them mercy. How is it that God can look at me (a filthy wicked sinner) and yet amazingly shown me mercy solely on the basis of Christ righteousness in my account? It is because His mercy is blind. Praise the Holy One who has done great things.

**Luke 1:49-50**—*For the Mighty One has done great things for me;  
And holy is His name.* ***50****“And His mercy is upon generation after generation Toward those who fear Him.*

1. # Dr. Josiah Grauman, Shepherds Conference 2024, **General Session 3: Triumph through Precepts**

   [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)